Welcome to the Event Tech podcast where we explore the ever evolving world of event technology every week. This show is brought to you by Endless Events, the event AV company that doesn't suck. Now, let's talk tech.

Brandt Krueger:
Hello everybody and welcome to another edition of the Event Tech podcast. That gentleman over there is Will Curran.

Will Curran:
And that gentleman over there is the clacky clackity clack, Brandt Krueger.

Brandt Krueger:
I'm not the clackity clack. You're the clackity clack keyboard. I have a clackity clack keyboard that I specifically. I do not use when we're recording because it is clackity clackity clackity. But that is not what we're here to talk about today. We're excited to have a wonderful guest, one that we've spoken to on EventIcons before. I've met him, had the pleasure of meeting him several times in person as well. And today we are going to be talking all about the power of multi hub meetings. More about what that is in just a moment. But our guest today is Maarten Vanneste. A little bit about him. He's been an entrepreneur since he was 18 years old. He's got 35 years plus experience in meeting design. He's an author, a speaker, a trainer. And since 2012, he has organized the FRESH Conference over there in Europe.

Brandt Krueger:
We talked a little bit about what was on tap for the FRESH Conference when we met at IMEX in Frankfurt, so I encourage you to go back to listen to that episode and find out more about what they've got in store for this one. But welcome to the show, Martin.

Maarten V.:
Hi, great to be here. How are you doing Brandt and Will over there in the United States of America?

Brandt Krueger:
We're doing very well, and we appreciate. You're joining us from Belgium tonight, which if I'm not mistaken is about 9 o'clock PM as we're recording. Is that about right?

Maarten V.:
That is correct. That is correct.

Brandt Krueger:
Yeah. Thank you so much for staying up late. We really appreciate it and we're excited to be talking to you today. Like I said a moment ago, we had a moment to sit down with you in Frankfurt and talk about the FRESH Conference, but at that time, while we were there, you handed me a copy of your new book, which is appropriately titled Multi-Hub Meetings. So we

wanted to get you on the show here and talk a little bit about, because you have been experimenting with this for quite some time and working your way into a good set of best practices. So we're like, this is really an opportunity for us to get you on the show and share a lot of that with the audience. Why don't we kind of start at the beginning, if you can kind of go back and tell us a little bit of the history leading up to the Multi-Hub, which I believe is kind of going back dealing with your experience with the FRESH Conference. Isn't that right?

Maarten V.:
Well, it even goes back a lot more, Brandt. I was involved with them and a company that did production and AV and technology for meetings. Our first multi-hub meeting was actually a recruitment event for PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2000 in the day when we still had these big, heavy monitors and we used ISDN lines for internet connection. That was the first experience with such a meeting.

Brandt Krueger:
Yeah. Those were definitely the days when we had the ISDN lines, and then, oh, it was amazing. We could link them together and you could double the bandwidth to some piddly amount of bandwidth. So you started there in production. What brought you closer to creating the FRESH Conference and then ultimately creating these multi-hub meetings?

Maarten V.:
Well, the first conference started in 2012, and it's the moment of the year when the Meeting Design Institute is actually bringing together the members and a lot of meeting planners and designers and facilitators and artists, lots of people that are doing things on the design side of meetings, the content side of meetings, meeting formats, trying to make meetings more productive, more effective. And so the FRESH Conference has started in 2012, and we started in Copenhagen in Denmark actually with the support of Copenhagen and Denmark financial support, and we stayed there for three years, and then moved down to Barcelona.

Maarten V.:
And then we did our first multi-hub meeting because we felt that this was something really coming up and really interesting, combining technology and meeting formats and interaction and a lot of other challenges into one format, which is multi hub. The first FRESH, we did five cities in Europe, and the second one we did four in Europe and one in the United States. And so that was a great experience where we experimented with a lot of different things.

Brandt Krueger:
So really with those first FRESH conferences, you are already doing the multi-hub thing. I guess I didn't really put that together.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. The first multi-hub was three years ago, so that was not so long ago actually, but that was the first one where we really split an actual conference, the first conference that existed as a

single-hub conference. There is a new word, single-hub conference. That was the first time that we actually splitted it up. This is one of the reasons why or one of the, let's say, scenarios that you could follow to start a multi-hub meeting is actually looking at an existing meeting and for the good reasons, slicing it up, cutting the meeting into different segments and bringing it together in a multi-hub meeting. So it's the same kind of meeting. It was still a two-day meeting. It's a two-day conference with about 200 people, but now it was in five different cities. So we had five groups of 40, roughly speaking, we had one group of 200.

Brandt Krueger:
Well, Will and Maarten, I did my usual thing. I get so excited about the topic that I just dive, dive right in. Probably Maarten should back us up a little bit and have you introduce yourself a little bit more to the audience. So if you could go back and tell us a little bit about how you got into the Meeting Design Institute and maybe some of the time leading us up from between those, PricewaterhouseCoopers events leading up to the creation of the FRESH Conference. Give us a little bit of the background and then we can dive back into the text. Sorry about that.

Maarten V.:
Okay. No problem. My start was in video. I was like photography was a hobby before I was 18. And then I started to see in the '80s VHS coming up. And then the first cameras appeared where people could film their own stuff on one of those bigger cameras on your shoulder and then a cable going down, and a VHS recorder hanging on hip level, and this was very early stuff. And I saw a potential future there, which excited me. And so I got the support of my parents and I invested in some Panasonic equipment, VHS editing equipment and camera and stuff. And really that's how I started, and rolled into audio visual with a local organization that did tours for farmers, and I did the sound and the light and the set. I built it up, I operated everything, and took it down again on my own. So that was a really hands on start as a young man.

Maarten V.:
Survived all those projects and probably moved into more professional work. And then from there discovering meetings as something that really excited me and I really saw an interesting activity in meetings, and stopped doing a lot of stuff and focused on meetings rather early. And then started asking myself the question, why do people do meetings? And this is how we started to think about Meeting Design and how we actually do meetings for a purpose, but we don't always know what the purpose is exactly. Slowly but surely developing some ideas around it. And then published the book, Meeting Architecture, in 2008. Oh my God, that's ... so more than 10 years ago.

Maarten V.:
So yeah, that book is a turning point, I think, in my career where I kind of, without knowing it, wrote a kind of a manifesto for a new discipline in the meetings industry where nobody could actually really focus on the, let's say, the inside of the meeting when a meeting planner closes the door and goes to take care of the next function. Who is taking care of the actual meeting

inside that room? Not the meeting owner because they don't really understand everything about meetings. They know everything about their product or their service, but somebody needs to be a professional there. So that was my book, Meeting Architecture, 2008.

Maarten V.:
And then in 2012, kind of as a result of that book, we got the support from Copenhagen and Denmark for FRESH, but before that, I actually also started in 2006, the Meeting Design Institute, which was kind of an organization that is member-based, and we have kind of members that do stuff on the meeting design side of things. This is really early days, and it was out of frustration almost, going to the meeting shows and see only venues and destinations and nothing about the actual meeting. What is the reason, I guess, people are coming together, but the business model is purely on logistics and travel and hospitality, which is great and important, and it's fundamental to a meeting of course. But I was kind of frustrated to see or to miss, to not see the stuff that actually needs to be good as well, the inside of the meeting, the presentations, the interaction, all that stuff.

Maarten V.:
2006 jump to 2012 where we started our conference after two smaller attempts in kind of a test phase, this was the real deal, FRESH. All along the way, I think we got more and more experience with the multi-hub thing, and it was quite exciting to see the internet evolve and see the equipment evolve, and to see things becoming really possible and easier to do than in 2000. And I think kind of in 2016, we really decided that this was potentially going to happen and potentially being a future model in the meetings industry and a niche within the meetings industry as a format, as something that companies could use to save a lot of money and to do things that were not possible in the past. We started to really invest in that with the company that I was a part of, ending up with this amazing package which is portable and easy, and it's making it possible now in really affordable and professional way.

Brandt Krueger:
Awesome.

Will Curran:
I love it. I definitely have so many questions about this model because I think as everyone knows from the live streaming episode, I'm really passionate about this idea that meetings don't have to all take place in one gigantic location, because A, live streaming is really exciting, but it also needs to be done the right way. And I also love this multi-hub model because I'm a part of an organization that actually recently this last year for their main year of conference decided to ... they call it decentralized summit instead of a total fly everybody to Kenyon like we did last year. So I'm curious to know a little bit about that SWAT analysis that you've done of multi hub. And for everyone who doesn't know what SWAT is, it's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Correct, Maarten?

Maarten V.:

Absolutely. Yeah.

Will Curran:
Do you want to give everyone a little bit about that breakdown of the entire multi-hub model?

Maarten V.:
Yeah. It's a model that actually is quite interesting and quite complex priced maybe. It has a lot of moving parts, and there's a lot of questions that people ask and there's also a lot of skepticism and fear around this model. And so there is a whole list of things. And I think I'm kind of a positive guy because my strengths pages, there's three of them, and the weaknesses is one, and opportunities ... I'm kind of optimistic about this thing. So yeah, what can I say?

Maarten V.:
Strengths, the first thing that people think of is saving money, and it actually does. It depends of course on how you do it because you could have a big production in each hub, which is one of the ways to do it. And then of course you have 20 hubs and you do a big production in 20 places, then obviously the bill is probably going to be close to what it is to do a single-hub session or conference. Saving money is also about saving time of participants. If you have to fly 1,000 people to one place and they all have a travel day coming in and a travel day going out, then obviously that's two additional days to the two-day conference and that is a cost to the company, which is considerable, of course. So saving money is definitely something that can work.

Maarten V.:
Then the second one that I've listed up here, because it's something that is done a lot by medical companies and pharmaceutical companies, and it's because of regulations. I know that there are several countries that are really strict and almost impossible to get a doctor to fly somewhere, or it becomes more and more difficult to do this. It's a bigger and bigger file that you have to do. So regulations in pharma are a big deal, and you could skip all that when you have local meetings. Not skip all that, but it becomes a lot easier and more doable to actually get people out of their hospitals. You could easily also do it in the hospital. We've done several of ... I've been part of several where the doctors actually stay in their hospital and the speakers ... four speakers are in four hospitals and everybody else just travels to those hospitals. And it could be four cities with groups of 12 or 15 or ... There's all sorts of models. But in pharma, there's a number of benefits, so yeah.

Maarten V.:
And then key opinion leader engagement. How do you get at this ... How do you get these professors or doctors or surgeons or the real heroes of cardiovascular surgery, for example? These people are so in demand. How do you get them to travel to wherever you have your conference and be a speaker? If they can stay in their city and have a group of participants around them and do the presentations for the participants in that room plus 5 other cities or 15

other cities for that matter, I mean that is a much easier thing to do for those famous VIP people. So that's another one.

Maarten V.:
Another one that I experienced was to have the local representation, the local salespeople in the room as well. For example, there was an ... if 18 hubs in Spain, so it's a single country, but it's big enough to do a multi-hub meeting. The local reps in their own city would select a restaurant or a hotel where they would do it and they would invite their local clients, the doctors or the surgeons or whatever they were to this room. And they would be very close to all these people. So instead of having a big conference of 500 where these people walk around and sit everywhere, and the representative has to look for them, it's not an easy thing. But when you have 15 of your closest clients in your own city in a room for a couple of hours and you can have dinner or something with them afterwards, that's a lot of power there.

Brandt Krueger:
Let me interrupt you there because you're making a really important point there, Maarten. And I want to make sure that that doesn't slide by our audience, that as we're going through all of these amazing strengths, I think that's where this multi-hub model really shines compared to just a straight up broadcast, right? Like I said, Will and I, we already kind of covered doing a, how to live stream an event, but really taking what you're talking about here and applying these hubs where you've got people getting together locally and meeting together locally is where you get this more powerful engagement. There's more powerful networking.

Brandt Krueger:
A lot of this stuff also applies to just live streaming, right, saving people money, that kind of thing. But when you start to get into these smaller groups, the brain power that comes together when you put together smaller groups and giving people, like you said, that local empowerment to make those hubs more appropriate, it's not the right word, but more effective in those local things. I just wanted to jump in there and make sure that we're really pointing that out to our audience that that's where this thing really shines. I'll let you kind of get back to the ... I'll let you get back to the strengths because there are quite a few of them.

Maarten V.:
No, it's a good point, Brandt. And I think we probably are going to come back to this because I have this part in the book also about kind of the human bandwidth, the connection between people and how it gets weaker and weaker as you move more and more away from the face to face meeting, and how multi-hub meetings are really almost the closest thing to a real face to face meeting. But I'm sure we'll back to that later. I think what also is important in the same field is the engagement, the feeling of being equally empowered. In a multi-hub meeting, if you do the right thing, then you will have a speaker in all the hubs. It's not always possible, but that's definitely something you need to try so people feel equally empowered.

Maarten V.:

But also the real multi-hub meeting in my definition means that every individual participant can actually say something because there is a microphone nearby within arms length, I tend to say, for they are empowered, they have the opportunity to speak. Everybody that grabs the microphone in the format that I most support, I would say, is when every participant can say something, ask a question to the speaker, even interrupt the speaker in a way that it's like in a normal meeting also when you have a small group and people can actually ask a question whenever they feel so.

Maarten V.:
The empowerment of the participant is also a big deal, I think, that is fading away as you move more and more towards like say a webinar where people are just watching a speaker. In multi-hub meetings, it feels much more engaged. The same works for speakers. The speakers are really engaged as well, because if you have a speaker that sits behind his desk and is to speak to an audience that is somewhere else and he doesn't see them or doesn't hear them or anything, it's difficult for the speaker to stay engaged. You are professionals in this stuff and so you know the difference between a speaker that is engaging and is in touch with his audience versus somebody that's just talking to a screen and a camera. So that's an important one as well.

Maarten V.:
Another one is I think also the quality of the networking. Smaller groups lead to better networking. It's more intense. You're closer together, you see each other a longer period of time, you have more time to build the relationship with the people in the room because remember the hub always has a group of people. So there is always participants in one room, that's a hub and that's one group of people connected to several other groups of people, but within this room, the participants actually can talk to each other not only during coffee breaks but also during conversation moments and they can get to know each other really quickly. So they meet new people, they get to know them and maybe get to like them even, and by the end of the day, even trust one or two of them. So you build really powerful relationships in such a small group.

Maarten V.:
The other thing is, maybe also plays into the money part, but it's the fast turn around. If you do a simple set up with a multi-hub meeting, you can actually limit your room use to the day that the meeting takes place. You don't have to build up the night before. Again, you can choose to have a big production, but if it's kind of the basic facility, the basic equipment, so to speak, then you can set it up in the morning and start the meeting at 10 o'clock or whatever. That's kind of quick turnaround. You don't need to book a room for three days to be able to do a one-day meeting or half a day meeting.

Maarten V.:
And I think maybe one of the bigger ones is the thing is face to face. You see the people around, but you also see all the other hubs, real multi-hub meeting. You will have a screen in front of you where you see the slides, but also where you see all the other hubs. So you see the

other participants in different cities around the world. You see their faces. There is a technician operating this camera and this camera is showing you somebody listening in let's say New York. And then another one, another video image ... You have this mosaic of little video images. And you see another person asking a question from Milan. And then another group of three, four people that are chatting during a discussion moment somewhere in, let's say, Atlanta. I don't know. There's this visual connection as well, which I think makes the thing a lot more exciting. That's my list of opportunities which is probably bigger. If you talk to people, they come up with other ideas and see different opportunities and strengths as well.

Brandt Krueger:
Absolutely. And I think there is something magical about that, hey, here's someone in this location, here's someone in this location, in the events that I've participated in. And maybe it's because I'm a huge nerd and I just ... even though I've been steeped in this for a long time, I'm still constantly really blown away and really enjoy connecting with people all over the world via the internet. Just the power that this enables us to have being able to speak to someone next door, I think as younger generations come in, they're going to just take that for granted. For me, it's still a really powerful thing. Like you say, okay, that person's in Milan, that person's in New York, that person's there and we're all experiencing this same thing, that still holds a lot of power for me.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. It's amazing. I mean we're just transitioning into that new way of doing things, but I think it's magic. It's absolutely magic.

Brandt Krueger:
It'll be probably boring for everybody else as the younger generations come up. Well, I think we covered the strengths really well. As you mentioned, I think we're both pretty optimistic about this technology and the power that it has. We got to hit the downside. Let's transition into the weaknesses a little bit and go through some of the things that may be this type of meeting isn't so good at.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. The first one that I have here is there is only local networking, so if you're an international organization and one of your key goals is to have international collaboration, then obviously bringing the people from France together in Paris and the people from Germany together in Berlin is not going to help the international collaboration. You're still going to be in national silos in a way for the networking. It's all about having your objectives clearly defined to see whether or not this is really a weakness or not. But you clearly can't do intense and good networking with people on the other side of the camera. So we've tried that with the second FRESH a little bit, but it's a challenge.

Maarten V.:

Then the other one is groups are smaller, so in that sense there is less opportunities for networking. If you have a specialized and mixed group of people, and one person, for example, is looking for all the specialists in heart valves, so to speak, and there's like 20 of them in a group of 200, but I want to talk to all 20 of them, but yeah, if two of them are in this country and five of them are in another country, and I'm here and I only have two or three to talk to, then that's also a limitation. The number of opportunities in networking are also smaller.

Maarten V.:
The other thing, maybe it's a weakness but maybe it's not. Maybe it depends on who you are and where you are in your career and how you look at this. But it is a little more work. If you have one hotel for a group of 200, it is a little less work than booking 10 hotels for groups of 20 for there's more contracts, so there's more work. But I'm hopeful that some of the booking agencies in the world will get ready for multi hub soon because they all think they are, but none of them really are ready for this. If you try to book one meeting and you say, I have one meeting with 500 people and I want 10 different hotels in 10 different cities in 10 different countries for the same dates for the same hour but there is a time difference, everything starts to become really difficult.

Maarten V.:
So there's a lot of work, I think, on that side, but I'm sure that this people they'll, if there is a market, they will obviously change the software and make it work. So there is a little more work for meeting planners, but we get paid for that. So maybe it's good news. Maybe it can increase the team and do more multi-hub meetings and you have more business.

Brandt Krueger:
So you're always trying to turn it into a positive, aren't you?

Maarten V.:
I know. I can't help it.

Brandt Krueger:
Now, this last one, I think-

Will Curran:
I love it.

Brandt Krueger:
... is one that's definitely hardest for me, and that's letting go of things. Tell us a little bit about the difficulties that people have there.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. I think it's a natural thing for a planner to have things planned and to have things under control. But if you're not in the five other venues if you do a six-hub meeting, then there is

limitations to what you can do. So working with professional teams I think is really important, and having a good structure and have reliable partners in every app is also very important. It's not an easy thing to imagine for some of us to see something like that work. There is this psychological barrier to cross there for many of us. It's a natural thing.

Brandt Krueger:
And then we move into opportunities.

Will Curran:
Well, I was going to say ... yeah. We could do opportunities. I feel like you started hitting on that end, but I almost want to make you do the threats first since you're still optimistic. But, you did the weaknesses. Let's go into opportunities. So opportunities, for anyone out there that does SWAT analysis, it's more about the future. Opportunities and threats are more about things that are looming in the future. Whereas strengths and weaknesses are existing in the present, opportunities and threats are things in the future. Did I get that right, Maarten?

Maarten V.:
I'm seeing different opportunities. I mean mainly the list that I've created here is the opportunities to create, to start a multi-hub meeting. When is there an opportunity to look at multi-hub meetings? Because I wouldn't totally recommend doing what we did with FRESH is like take a meeting that you have and cut it into five parts and then make it a multi-hub meeting. That's not necessarily going to be a great solution. There are several other opportunities where you could actually consider this. And the first one would be just when you start thinking about a new meeting, so a meeting that has no culture or no past or no history, you haven't done it before, that could be certainly a meeting that you could look at to turn it into multi-hub meeting.

Maarten V.:
The second one that I see as an opportunity is, I think you guys touched on that already at the beginning of this conversation is to have an intermediate meeting in between an annual meeting. If you have a real meeting and you're 1,000 people once a year, and you put in a city somewhere in America, you could have a second meeting in between those big ones and have the same group of people come together again for a shorter meeting, for example, but kind of an update or an upgrade or new things that are happening for the same group of people. Do a half-day meeting instead of a two-day, on site, face to face meeting. You now have local hubs. In every state you have a hub, and you bring everybody together in a multi-hub format. Add a meeting in between an existing one.

Brandt Krueger:
You cut out a little bit there, Maarten. If you could just go back a little bit on that.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. I'm looking too much down on my book. Sorry.

Brandt Krueger:
It's all right.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. To create a new meeting is one. To have intermediate meetings in real face to face meeting is two. Number three, I think would be to add hubs to an existing meeting. Add hubs to an existing meeting means that you have a meeting where you bring together a number of people. It could be an association, for example. You say, well, this meeting actually takes place in the same time zone as Mexico and as Venezuela. Yeah. I'm just naming a few more southern but they can't come because they can't leave the country or they don't have the funds to do this or whatever, bring the meeting to them in the form of a hub and have like five South American hubs, for example, connect them to your existing North American hub, put a few speakers in those hubs as well, and then create a good script where the people can have local conversations among each other as well and engage in meetings. So that's adding hubs to an existing meeting is also an opportunity to do that.

Maarten V.:
Also to merge a roadshow to one date. Some people do road shows and they're quite challenging in different ways as well in the sense that you have to have the same speakers do the road show for seven days in the month or something. So bringing all that together, it still is kind of a road show but it's all on the same day, and you put the speakers in different hubs and you have something that is similar but it's only one day now, so it becomes more cost effective, easier to book your VIP speakers, etc., so that's an opportunity as well.

Maarten V.:
The one that I wouldn't really recommend unless you have good reasons for it is to cut an existing meeting to several hubs. It's what we did with FRESH Conference, but yeah, you have to have good reasons to do that. And then the last one I think is definitely an important one. It's improving what you have with a webcast or with a webinar. So if you do regular presentations online and you have individuals watching, you probably experience how difficult it is to keep them excited and to keep them online and to keep them focused. So bringing those people together instead of being individual sitting behind their laptop, you bring them into a room, you give them a cup of coffee or a welcome drink or something, and then have hubs instead of individuals. That is a big step up in the engagement scale. That's something you can also do as my last opportunity.

Will Curran:
All right. And then now I really am always excited for the threats category because I feel like it always creates this sense of urgency to fix things. I'm not sure if it's my problem solving mind that comes in, but when I think about threats, I'm like, oh, I want to solve it and make it better and everything like that. Let's go into threats which are the incoming negative things that potentially could jeopardize this sort of model in the future.

Maarten V.:
I guess this must be a neurological defect on my side. I don't have any.

Brandt Krueger:
We're going to have to dive into the book then. We can pull them out-

Will Curran:
I love it.

Brandt Krueger:
... from the book.

Maarten V.:
It's the other page.

Brandt Krueger:
No. Don't worry. I've got them right here, so you don't have to go searching for them, because we lose you when you start looking into the book. So what we've got are the threats toward single-venue meetings, and I'm assuming this is probably something similar to what we see when we're talking about just hybrid and virtual events in general, where there's still even after all these years, this lingering, oh, I'm just worried that it's going to cannibalize my in-person audience. It's going to somehow be detrimental to the single-venue meeting. Is that kind of what you're talking about?

Maarten V.:
Yeah. It's really more the multi-hub meeting being a threat towards single-venue meetings. I think this is a perceived threat. If there's people doing multi-hub meetings, it may be that these are all new meetings and these are meetings from maybe even new organizers like LinkedIn group owners that do multi-hub meetings and stuff. And therefore I think the venues will see more and more of those multi-hub meetings and they will have smaller groups, but it's a group anyway. And it could be okay, but it's perceived as a threat by venues that they feel that this is only going to give them small groups in the future.

Brandt Krueger:
Right. It's more a threat to the model, the single-meeting model of, why would I want to go to this one location meeting where I could be part of this multi hub thing.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. Correct.

Brandt Krueger:

And then one of the things that you listed, and I'm curious to get your take on it was complacency. One of the threats that we face is complacency. Can you expand a little bit on that?

Maarten V.:
Yeah. Yeah. I think we have the same challenge with presentations and with meeting design in general. It's kind of difficult, I think. I've seen the first time somebody asked me about engaging participants. Too many people are falling asleep, this guy said. We need to do something about these presentations. They're not exciting. The speakers need to be better, and we need to get interaction going and stuff. And this was 1984, one of the first conferences I was ever involved with. I think still to date, a lot of conferences I've learned a lot, but a lot of sessions, a lot of presentations are still not really interactive, and so that is the same thing. You can bring in activities and stimulate speakers, but if you let speakers speak, they will speak. Speakers will be the experts that feel that they have to give the audience all the stuff that they can give them and as much as possible. And it's more about showing their intellect sometimes than really doing an effective presentation.

Maarten V.:
It's more about trying to be as good as possible or give the audience as much as possible rather than actually designing the presentation so that people actually learn something and not get overloaded with information. So that kind of complacency may also happen with multi-hub meetings where we just start to say, yeah, do we really need cameras on all sides, and do we really need microphones for all the participants, but not all of them are using them, etc. And then it waters down to like almost a webcast. You now have groups of audiences sitting, watching a screen, listening to a speaker. I mean we just can't have that with multi-hub meetings. They are even more in danger of a lack of interaction than normal meetings are. And we're not doing a good job overall speaking with normal meetings where you have all 500 people in a single room.

Maarten V.:
So I think that needs to be ... that is probably one of the bigger threats. And I've already seen large companies being very successful with multi-hub meetings that were managed by the same person, by the same planner who really make sure that there was always brief speakers and some cameras, and operated cameras and microphones, and operated sounds in every room. And then you see other people in the company say, wow, that seems perfect. I got great input from the participants. And then they start doing the same type of multi-hub meetings, but they are not as strict in the AV support and the technical support and the scripting of this multi-hub meeting, and then it waters down to, what can I say, a webinar on steroids maybe, but that's all it is. And I think that's a threat for multi-hub meetings.

Maarten V.:
I can do that. And then forget about doing a professional job, and that's going to really eat away the quality of what a multi-hub meeting actually can do.

Brandt Krueger:
So many things to process there. I was just kind of rolling my head around a little bit. In the book, you offer a lot of case studies and walk through exactly how this has worked for a bunch of the different types of events out there. I'm curious. We don't really have time to go into each one of those, but maybe you could just expand a little bit on the various types of events that this has worked for, and some of the things that you learned from each of those different types of multi-hub meetings.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. I think one of the more exciting ones was for a Portuguese governmental organization. I wasn't actually involved in this meeting, so I got this case written down by one of my industry friends, and she set a meeting in the Azores send this to the number of islands. And so each of the islands they had a hub and there was an audience, and the minister of culture or whatever was speaking from Portugal to them. And they could actually talk to him and actually say something or ask a question. And there was a very emotional moment where one of the participants actually started to cry because she was so happy to have the minister of culture in the room as almost, so to speak. She could talk to him. That shows, I think, if you do the right thing and you have the cameras and you have the microphones, and people have ... people really feel that they are close to whoever is on the other side. That's quite a powerful experience.

Maarten V.:
Another one is more like a bigger production where they had all the company employees in a theater room or in a bigger meeting room, 100 to 200 people per country, 29 countries. This is with big sets of cameras everywhere. They actually did a great scripting and that is production, really getting people to send in the best practice or a great story about being in the medical field and helping the sick or helping patients.

Maarten V.:
And so they selected one case per each for each country and they had presentations around these cases. This was really engaging for the local audience and empowering for the person that had this case presented, and they had a tremendous success and engagement, and everybody loved this meeting as well. That was 29 different countries, so you can imagine the amount of flights and time that was saved in doing this. You have them in all sorts, from very simple to really big productions, from two, three countries all the way up to 29 countries, so it's a nice variation of cases that you can find in this book.

Brandt Krueger:
So as we start to wind things down here a little bit, you brought up my favorite thing about having to let go, but Will and I were kind of chatting on the back end and he was asked about the staffing, that, how do you find quality staffing when you're trying to set up these things in remote locations? And how do you really trust those people that are kind of on the ground there in your local hubs?

Maarten V.:

Yeah. So my experience actually is mainly on the multi-hub meetings that are simplified to one or two person crew, and yet having up to two cameras in a room which are operated and switched, having microphones on every table. And so what happens is in that situation, the technicians are actually trained by one company and they are technicians from one company, and the technicians fly to the locations. So that is really something else. As a meeting planner, you actually call one company and you tell them, that's the date, that's the time. We have these 7 or 17 locations. We start at 10:00. And so then at 10 o'clock they will all be ready. So that's one call for a planner to get all the equipment and stuff hooked.

Maarten V.:

It's all standardized. They all work with the same cameras. They all have the same switcher and they all have the same sound system. They all have the same software. They all have the same experience. They all speak the same language, literally speak the same language, and, or figuratively speaking same language. And you guys know how important that is for technicians to understand cues and stuff. To intercom, in this case, through WhatsApp or another channel. And that's a format that I think is the most powerful in a sense, and it makes it really easy to book and really affordable also. They take the equipment with them, but it's hand luggage in the smallest format and it's hand luggage, two check in suitcases in the biggest format. So it's really, really compact stuff.

Maarten V.:

And it's not a big production. It's not with, it's not with operated cameras with professional cameramen, but it is with moving cameras that can zoom and up, down, left, right. And they are remotely controlled by a technician. There's lots of great stuff out there, great equipment tuned to make this possible now. That is, I think, the most solid multi-hub meeting technology that I could think of. But I guess you have lots of experience with working internationally, and so I think from there, you just have to work with the people you know.

Maarten V.:

If you send one technician or two technicians or maybe just this technician or a coordinator to a room of 100 people all over the US in different States, then that's still a lot of flights that you save when you have 100 people in that room over there. Sending one technician is only one flight instead of sending 100 people to one central location. It's 100 flights, so you still save a lot of money. You still are good for the environment, if that matters to you, then you save a lot of CO_2, a lot of time for the participants. It's just sending people out is I think what we also should consider so that to make that to work.

Brandt Krueger:

One of the pictures that's more fun for me in the book is the photo of 18 backpacks all lined up in a row that had all of the gear unnecessary for sending out with the technicians onto each one of their shows. And so one of the things that's been fun for me to watch is as this technology

evolves and gets better and smaller, the ability that we now have that used to cost tens of thousands of dollars to set up studios and things like that on the road, now we can bring in a single pelican case as a checked bag on an airline or even a carry-on-bag if we're just bringing the basics along with us. One of the things that you emphasize in the book is the importance of standardization in order to make sure that we are keeping that consistent experience from hub to hub. I'm wondering if you could expand a little bit on that, which will kind of guide us as we wind down into any other best practices that you might have regarding someone who wants to try this out.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. So standardization, I think, is all about the making it easy for everybody. If you have technicians that work with the same gear, they can help each other. If there's setup moments where one technician in one country has an issue with camera control unit, for example, the guy that knows the most about this maybe somewhere else in another country and he's available, they can have a chat for five minutes and help each other out. So that really makes it reliable, it makes it easy. You have standardized training for the technicians because if you have 20 hubs, you need 20 technicians, or maybe 40, if they're all bigger hubs. They all need to be trained in a way, and you can standardize that training. It's just good for everybody, for liability, for costs, for quality. It's just a good thing to standardize. It's not always possible, of course, but yeah, there is opportunities to make it work through standardization.

Maarten V.:
I think one of the other best practices, if I can just continue here-

Brandt Krueger:
Yeah, yeah, yeah. Please do.

Maarten V.:
The other best practice I think is to make sure you have a good script. So preparing this with some input from a person with experience is quite important. So having a good script is going to help everybody. Talking to the speakers to make them see what is in the script and what is their role, and how much time they get to speak, and why it's shorter than usual, and how they can engage the participants, and also building in those five minutes of local conversation, that is also magic.

Maarten V.:
So in the middle of the meeting, you have a multi-hub meeting happening. All of a sudden you tell people, here is a discussion topic, so turn to people around you in your room and have a local discussion for five minutes. And we put the countdown clock on the screen. People see the countdown clock in one of the little windows, and now they are talking to each other, and maybe they're preparing a question for the speaker, or maybe they're looking to an answer for a challenge or a case that was presented. So the local engagement is really important.

Maarten V.:

Another thing is, I already mentioned this is having a speaker in every hub is a big difference. If you have a hub that is only listening, they feel less valued than when they have a speaker in the hub. So a few tips that I think are really crucially important.

Brandt Krueger:

Awesome. Well, as we start to kind of bring this amazing conversation to a close, I think it's really going to give such an amazing follow up, I think, to our livestreaming conversation as far as understanding the strategy and the why behind how we're going to do this. Maarten, we want to ask you a little bit about your tips and kind of beyond just multi hub, what would be your one tip that you would give to anyone out there who's looking to implement multi hub in their next events?

Maarten V.:

One single tip-

Brandt Krueger:

It's like choosing which of your children is the best, right?

Maarten V.:

I think it's a tip that probably works for all conferences, but if you do a multi-hub meeting, be serious about it. Don't say, yeah, yeah, I've done several Skype meetings. I know how this works. We can do this. Prepare this, and take a little more time, and work with professionals, work with some people that have experience. There's not a lot of people that have a lot of experience with this. But I think there is so much to learn in a short period of time. If your speakers also, because they don't believe that this is possible. All these things ... Make sure you have this moment of interaction.

Maarten V.:

All these things are more or less the same than with the real meeting. But I think even more important than ever, more important than with a normal single-hub meeting is to make sure that you have these things under control and you have a good script and you have a professional approach to this. I would say maybe the number one tip is buying this book, because it's going to help you to learn and to read a few cases, and to get inspired and to be able to sell this because it's going to be an uphill battle. If you try to do a multi-hub meeting, you'll get a lot of skepticism and fear, so you better get ready for this. Yeah. That's not one tip, I know.

Will Curran:

I think you lead perfectly into the next question I was going to ask, which is what sort of favorite resources do you have that everyone should check out? So obviously the book, but beyond the book, what else do you think that everyone should check out?

Maarten V.:

On multi-hub meetings, I think there is, yeah, I've told you one, if you have the opportunity to experience one, that's a big deal. Try to go to one if possible. That's probably the best resource out there. It's not so standardized as a resource, of course, but it's hard to think of any other papers or resources. Maybe when you would look at PCMA, for example, and their digital certification, maybe that could be also a good base to learn some stuff. It takes a little more effort, of course, but yeah. Without being too commercial, I think the book is called Multi-Hub Meetings, just get it on Amazon, spend some dollars on it. That's the best ... You'll find so much information there.

Maarten V.:
And also, the third part of the book is actually written by the participants at the previous FRESH Conference when we talked about multi-hub meetings, and they gave their ideas and fears and comments on multi-hub meetings. One third of the content is actually co-created at a multi-hub meeting. It's good information. It's got all the good and bad plate.

Brandt Krueger:
All right. Well then, the last ... Maybe you were going to say the same thing I was going to say, Will. We can find out if it was-

Will Curran:
No, no.

Brandt Krueger:
... and if it wasn't. So why don't you go ahead.

Will Curran:
Should we say it at the same time, Brandt?

Brandt Krueger:
That's what I was going to say. Oh man, oh geez. Okay.

Will Curran:
What I was going to say is one of my favorite questions I'd love to end this show on is what technologies are you excited for that are coming down the pipeline, maybe not related to exactly ... all right. It's like we host this podcast all the time. Yeah. It was about the technology that you're most excited for. I'd love to hear it for me, and we always try and make it fit inside the show as well.

Maarten V.:
Yeah. It's not maybe meeting related, but it's the technology that's growing inside of Tesla at the moment. I am a big fan of Tesla and their electric cars. My first electric car, I bought in 2011, so eight years ago, May, 2011. And now we have three electric cars, and one is Tesla. And if you see what's happening there with autopilots and how the system is learning, so AI I guess is a

big deal, is a big part of that. It's amazing how this is evolving and how the world is going to change when this thing is grown up. It still has a lot to learn, but it's learning automatically from all the cars that are on the roads, and the machine-based learning is really incredible. So I think not sure if and how this is going to impact meetings, but machine learning and artificial intelligence, I'm sure it will be applied to meetings, but I think that is really, really exciting futuristic stuff.

Brandt Krueger:
I think you're right. It's a fascinating potential and future. I think there's a 50/50 chance that my daughters might not even learn how to drive at this point based on the potential for either just using the ride sharing economy as a bridge until we get to full autonomous driving. But like I said, I think it's about a 50/50 chance. Well, very cool. Thank you so much for joining us, Maarten. Really appreciate it. I hope there's a lot of things there that folks are going to be able to take home, and of course we'll drop links into other show resources so that they are able to buy a copy of the Multi-Hub Meetings. Where can folks find out more about you and what you're up to these days?

Maarten V.:
There is a couple of places. They can connect on LinkedIn. There is quite an active group called Meeting Architecture on LinkedIn as well. And there is a website called the meetingdesigninstitute.org, O-R-G. so that is where you can register for newsletters and stuff, and there is information about the FRESH Conference, which is also the freshconference.com is a website as well. Yeah. Just Google me and you'll find some stuff, but makes sure you write my name in the right way, in the Dutch way, the Dutch speaking way. So it's Maarten Vanneste, but it's written with a double A and a double N. You'll put it out there in the correct way, I'm sure.

Will Curran:
Awesome. Well, as we start to take it home, Maarten, seriously, thank you so much. We literally love having you on the show. I mean we did so many interviews together in Frankfurt and I think it's because we just love talking about all the awesome things. Literally, I think we could make this a four-hour long episode, super degrees. So Maarten, thank you so much for being on the show.

Maarten V.:
It's a pleasure. Thank you for having me, Will and Brandt. I'm looking forward to the next one.

Will Curran:
Absolutely. And thank you to my cohost, Brandt, the ever clackity clackity Brandt Krueger, and I appreciate you for joining me today.

Brandt Krueger:
Pleasure as always.

Will Curran:
Awesome. Well, everyone, thank you guys so much for tuning in. You know that the best possible way to listen to this podcast is to head over to eventtechpodcast.com. That's where you're going to see the show notes, all the links to all the awesome stuff that Maarten recommended, transcriptions, invites to our exclusive LinkedIn and Facebook groups. Also, if you aren't already subscribed and you're listening to this on the blog or you stumbled upon this on YouTube, you can also get all the links there to subscribe, iTunes, PocketCasts, Google Play, Spotify. How many more podcasting platforms can I say? That sounds like a rap. That's where you're going to end up getting it done.

Will Curran:
But we also want to hear from you guys as well. Obviously this isn't a live show, so we love hearing your guys' comments, what you think. So make sure to contact us. You know where to find us on any social network. Just use #eventtechpodcasts, or you can also just shoot us an email directly, and Brandt and I see every single one of those emails. Just shoot it over to eventtechpodcast.com. Sorry, eventtechpodcast@helloendless.com. That means we need to wrap it up. Thank you guys so much for tuning in today to this week's Event Tech podcast. Thank you again, Maarten. Thank you again, Brandt, and we will see you guys next week on the Event Tech podcast.

Thanks again for listening to the Event Tech podcast. Be sure to rate and review us on your favorite podcasting app. Also, be sure to head to eventtechpodcast.com and leave us a comment about this week's episode. We'll see you next week on the Event Tech podcast.

Event Tech, out, out, out, out, out, out, out.